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ERNS and OPA 90

Emergency Response Notification System (ERNS) Fact Sheet

Office of Emergency and Remedial Response
Oil Program Center 5203G

Quick Reference Fact Sheet

What is ERNS?

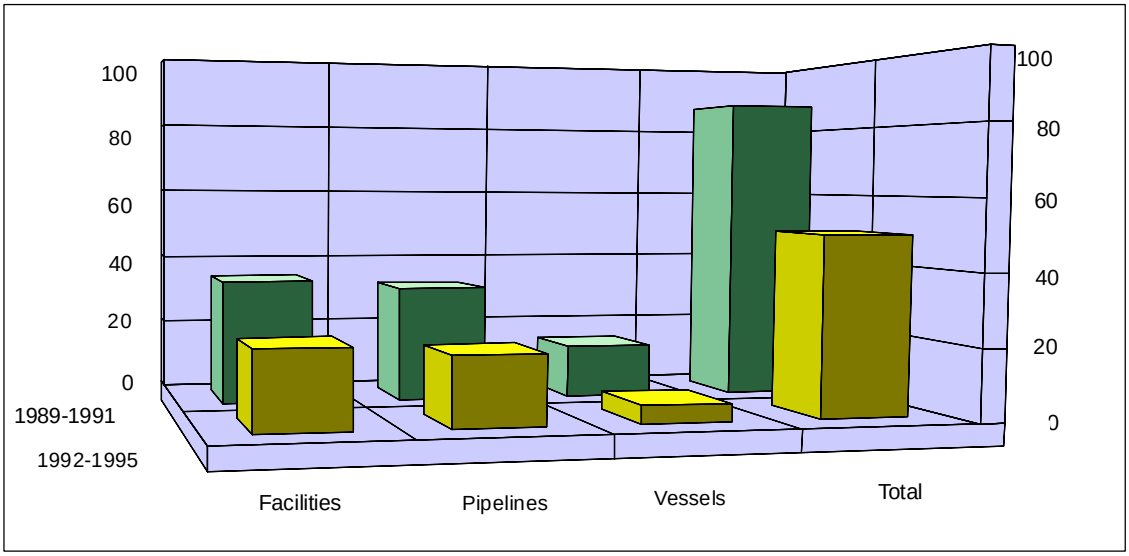
The Emergency Response Notification System (ERNS) is a database of initial notifications of releases of oil and hazardous substances that have occurred throughout the United States and have been reported to the National Response Center (NRC) or any of the ten EPA Regions. The initial notification data may be updated with information from various Federal, State, and local response authorities as appropriate. ERNS data can be used to analyze release notifications, support emergency planning efforts, and assist decision makers in developing spill prevention programs.

What is the Oil Pollution Act of 1990?

The Oil Pollution Act of 1990 (OPA 90) was enacted on August 18, 1990, largely due to concerns about the Exxon Valdez oil spill cleanup. The purpose of OPA 90 is to expand oil spill prevention and preparedness activities, improve response capabilities, increase the liability of parties responsible for spills, and expand research and development programs. Among other things, OPA 90 expands and amends section 311(j) of the Clean Water Act, adding the requirements for preparation and review of facility and vessel response plans, as well as area contingency plans. These plans are required to contain provisions for responding to a worst case discharge of oil, and they began to be implemented in 1992 and 1993.

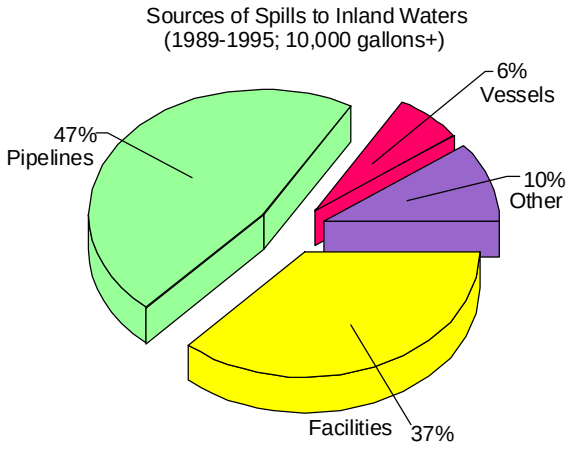
Number of Annual Spills Has Declined

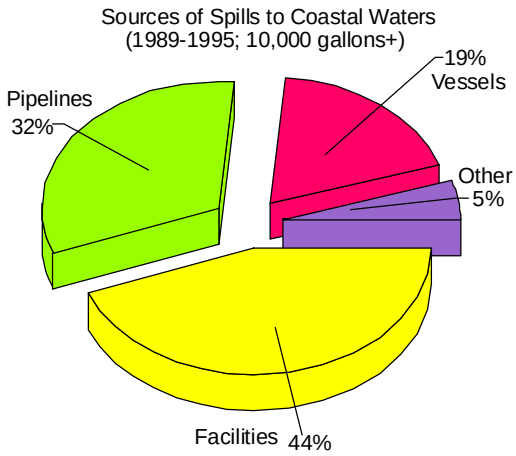
The graph below uses ERNS data to show the average annual number of reported oil spills to water of at least 10,000 gallons before and after the implementation of OPA 90. As the graph indicates, the number of spill reports in ERNS decreases for the period 1992-1995 when compared against the period from 1989-1991 for facilities, vessels, and pipelines. Overall, the number of reported spills over 10,000 gallons decreased by 43%, with vessels showing the largest decrease of 66%.



Spill Response Preparation

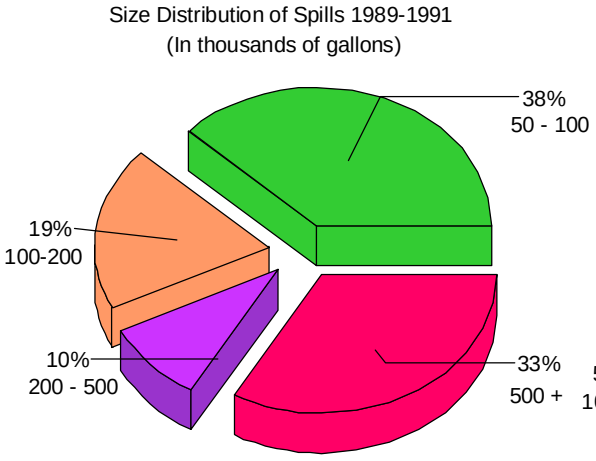
Understanding the likely source of oil spills can help in preparing for and responding to accidental discharges. By examining patterns of oil spills in a particular area, a spill response organization can improve its response capabilities. For example, although spills to inland and coastal waters originate from many of the same sources, large oil spills in inland waters are much more likely to be from pipelines than those in coastal waters.

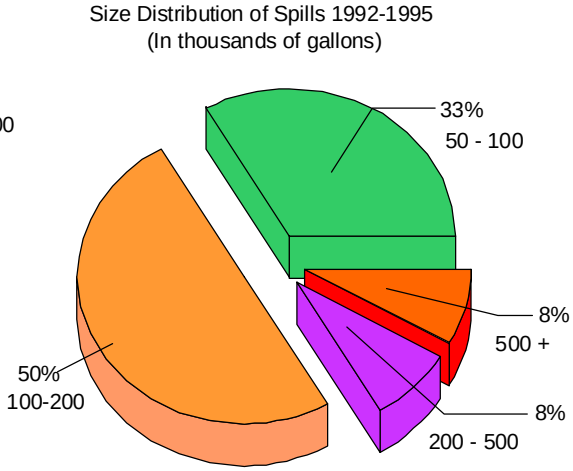




Number of Large Spills Decreases

Although OPA 90 hasn't eliminated all accidental releases, it has helped to reduce both the number of spills and the magnitude of the spills that occur. As the two graphs below reveal, the percentage of reported spills of more than 200,000 gallons to water from facilities has declined by over 60 percent.





Obtaining ERNS Data

Additional information on the ERNS database may be obtained by calling the ERNS Information Line at (202) 260-2342, by sending an e-mail request to erns.info@epamail.epa.gov, or by writing to EPA at the following address:

ERNS Manager
U.S. EPA
Mail Code 5203G
401 M Street SW
Washington, DC 20460

ERNS data are also available through the Internet at the following addresses:

World Wide Web: http://www.epa.gov/ERNS
Anonymous FTP Server: ftp.epa.gov